

# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Learning Centers

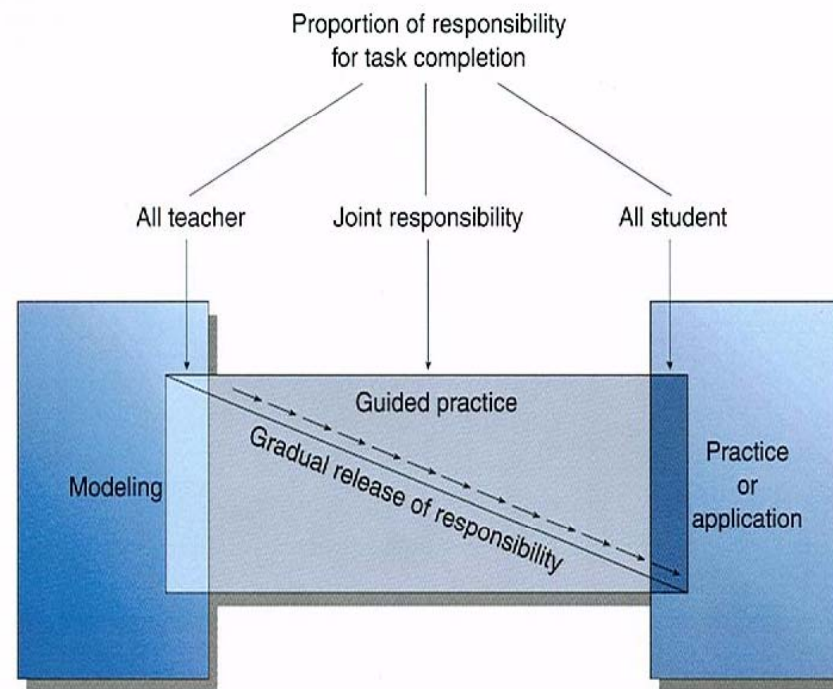


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**Utah State University**  
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# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Learning Centers

FIGURE 6.4: The Gradual Release of Responsibility model of instruction

T 6.2





## Refining Literacy Centers

*“All battles are won before  
they are fought.”*

Sun Tzu





# Research

**“Transition times can be cut by over 50% when teachers systematically train students to transition.”**

(LaFluer, Witt, Naquin, Harwell and Gilbertson, 1998)

**“Classrooms with specific routines ... have fewer off-task and disruptive behaviors than classrooms without such procedures.”**

(Emmer and Evertson, 1981)

# Research

Two major findings of Cameron, C. E., Connor, C. M., & Morrison, F. J. (2005).

*Effects of variation in teacher organization on classroom functioning.*

- the more time the teachers spent on ‘orient-organize’ tasks in the fall, the less time the children spent in transitions between activities in the spring.
- teachers who spent more time on organization instruction in the fall, coupled with less time on organization in the winter, had children spending more time in ‘child-managed’ activities in the spring.

# Consider the Time

## 90 Minute Reading Block

- -5 minutes to find a misplaced T.E.
  - 85
  - -5 minutes to redirect after a fuss
  - 80
  - -5 minutes for bathroom breaks or pencil sharpening
  - 75
  - -5 minutes of interruptions during small group instruction
- 70 minutes of reading remaining**



# Consider the Time

If 20 minutes of reading time is lost every day...

$20 \text{ min} \times 180 \text{ days} = 3,600 \text{ min/yr}$

**FORTY 90 Minute Block periods for reading lost each year! (2 months of school!)**



## Expectations, Instruction, and Being Proactive

List Expectations you have for your students.

Chunk the list into modeling activities that you will (must) model during the first days of school.

Begin with short whole class lessons and movement within the class and around the school.

Don't commit "assumicide" –Be sure to **TEACH** the procedure of behavior , **MODEL** it, and **REVIEW** it frequently



# Consider This

Begin your small group teaching station only after you have “walked the centers” to monitor proper procedures.

Keep your teacher group station out of the rotation so your selection of group members for different purposes can be flexible.

Address and model trouble-shooting procedures in advance.

# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Learning Centers

- Learning centers are to support the essential elements of reading instruction: Alphabetics & Decoding, Fluency, Comprehension, & Writing
- Only previously taught strategies and tasks should be found in learning centers – practice NOT exploration!
- At some point tasks must be differentiated for children – Not the same task/level for all children in the center.





# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Learning Centers

- Learning centers must encourage self regulation and independence
- Learning centers must have a leader
- Learning centers must have clear procedures for entry, behavior, clean up, and exit
- Learning centers must have an overall routine for use
- Learning centers must require accountability of students





# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Learning Centers

- Learning centers need clearly posted directions, objectives, and expectations or rules
- If there isn't sufficient room for stand alone learning centers – make transportable centers.



# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Learning Centers

- Learning centers must be clearly organized with sufficient tools and texts



- Learning centers must have an explicitly labeled place for everything – Every thing has a place and is in its place



# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Learning Centers

- Learning centers must include “literacy enriched play” dramatic play centers for developing kindergarten children’s oral language





# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Learning Centers

- Develop learning centers one at a time and get them right before creating another.
- Add other learning centers as you are able to create and manage



# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Classroom Procedures

## Example Daily Schedule (180 Minutes Literacy)

8:30 - 9:00 AM: Morning Routine (Roll, Lunch, Weather, Calendar, Daily Schedule, Read Aloud)  
9:00 - 9:30 AM: Writing Block – Mini-lesson & Writer's Workshop  
9:30 – 10:00 AM: Word Work – Phonics, Spelling, and Vocabulary  
10:00 – 10:30AM: Reading Fluency Lesson & Practice  
10:30 – 10:45 AM: Recess  
10:45 – 11:15 AM: Comprehension Strategy Instruction  
11:15 - 12:15 PM: Small Group Differentiated Reading Instruction/ Learning Centers  
12:15 – 12:45 PM: LUNCH  
12:45 – 1:15 PM: Science Experiment – Vinegar & Soda Gases  
1:15 – 2:15 PM: Mathematics Instruction and Practice Centers  
2:15- 2:30 PM: Recess  
2:30 – 3:00 PM: Social Studies Theme Activity



## Schedule –

8:20 to 8:30 –  
Bell work, pledge,  
class motto, song

8:30 to 9:55 –  
Language Arts

9:55 to 10:10 –  
Recess

10:10 to 10:30 –  
Fluency

10:30 to 11:00 –  
Writing

11:00 to 11:55 –  
Math

11:55 to 12:25 –  
Lunch

12:25 to 1:30 –  
Centers/Small groups

1:30 to 1:45 –  
Recess

1:45 to 2:15 –  
Music

2:15 to 2:45 –  
Art/Science/Social  
Studies/PE/Other

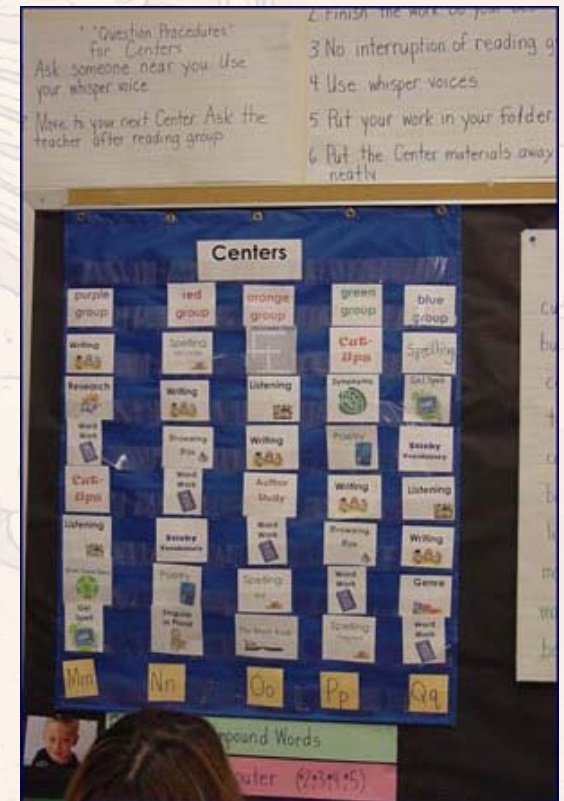
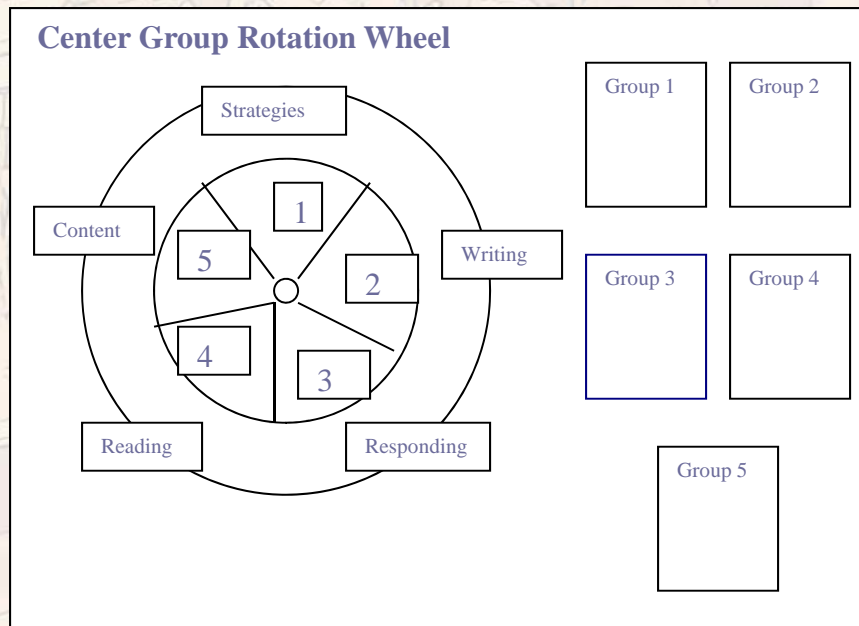
2:45 – Go Home



# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Classroom Procedures

## Scheduling and Managing Centers

- Managing Movement and Activity





# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Classroom Procedures



## Training Children for Work in Centers SIX WEEK TRAINING

### ➤ First Week of Training

- Have Literacy and Exploratory/Play Centers completely designed and set up.
- Ignore the center spaces and materials placed in and around the room. Children will ask. Tell them later when they have learned what they need to learn to work in these areas.
- Focus attention on whole group, teacher led interactive read alouds, shared readings, modeled and interactive writing sessions.
- Spend time during this first week collecting assessment data on children's behavioral abilities to follow directions, listen in whole group settings, and remain on-task and focused.
- Gather data on children's literacy related knowledge of letters, words, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Spend a bit of time learning about children's interests, attitudes, and motivations generally and those specific to reading books and writing.

# Managing Literacy & Exploratory Learning Centers



## Training Children for Work in Centers SIX WEEK TRAINING

### ➤ Second Week of Training

- Mention to students that in a few weeks they will be working more often in small groups and independently in the spaces designated and set up around the classroom, but there is much they need to learn before they can do so.
- Explain what each literacy or center space of the classroom is for, such as a listening area, paired reading nook, alphabet and word work area, housekeeping, a writing center, and so on.
- Take time to explain one or two spaces per day during the second week but do not let the children enter or use these spaces and materials yet.

# Managing Literacy & Exploratory Learning Centers



## Training Children for Work in Centers SIX WEEK TRAINING

### ➤ Third Week of Training

- Take one-two literacy spaces or classroom centers per week and fully explain and model how students are to enter these spaces.
- On the first day model how students should go to a center like the writing area in the classroom. Show children that before going to this space they are to pick up their writing folders and quietly gather around the rules and the directions posted for the day with other children in the writing area.
- On the second day of the week, explain that a team leader will be appointed by the teacher to lead the small group in a review of the rules and directions each day. Model how this is to be accomplished through a quiet oral reading of the posted rules and the directions for working in the writing area that day. Be sure to model how the team leader is to ask if there are any questions and answer these where possible.



# Managing Literacy & Exploratory Learning Centers



## Training Children for Work in Centers SIX WEEK TRAINING

### ➤ Third Week of Training

- On the third day of the week, the teacher models how students are to take their places in the writing space and wait for the team leader to distribute any needed materials for completing the task for the day. On this same day, the third day, the teacher discusses with children the expectations that assigned tasks will be completed in the time allotted either independently or with others depending on the directions for the day. The teacher also shows children how they are to seat themselves for independent work in the writing center using independent workspace cardboard dividers or how to seat themselves when working in pairs or as a small group.

# Managing Literacy & Exploratory Learning Centers



## Training Children for Work in Centers SIX WEEK TRAINING

### ➤ Third Week of Training

- On the fourth day of the third week, the teacher explicitly explains the consequences for failure to follow directions and obey the rules. She directs children's attention to the posted consequences for failure to follow directions and behave appropriately in this work space.
- On the last day of the third week of training, the teacher models the clean up process for the example center, the writing center. She rings a bell or some other signaling device that alerts children's attention that time for using this space has ended. She models how children are to freeze quietly in place. The only person moving is the team leader who gathers up the materials and puts them into their proper places. A final bell or signal alerts children that they are to move to another space or to return to their own seats in the classroom. As a result, the training of this single example space, the writing center, will likely take 10 minutes per day for the entire third week of the school year.

# Managing Literacy & Exploratory Learning Centers

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Training Children for Work in Centers  
**SIX WEEK TRAINING**

5

## ➤ Fourth – Fifth Weeks of Training

- This process is repeated at a slightly accelerated pace during the fourth and fifth weeks, within each of the remaining classroom literacy centers or spaces.



# Managing Literacy & Exploratory Learning Centers



## Training Children for Work in Centers SIX WEEK TRAINING

### ➤ Sixth Week of Training

- During the sixth and final week of training, teachers form small groups with team leaders for role playing the use of the literacy spaces and materials around the classroom. To begin, movement from their seats to their first assigned literacy space is practiced. Movement from one literacy space to another space using planned rotations during the literacy time block is also practiced. The wise teacher realizes that children must be able to role play these movements and behaviors to fully understand and internalize them.

# Managing Literacy & Exploratory Learning Centers



## Training Children for Work in Centers SIX WEEK TRAINING

### ➤ Sixth Week of Training

- During the role play, anyone who fails to follow protocols exactly causes the entire group to stop and re-practice the movement and expected behaviors. Remaining firm about meeting expectations as children role play their use of these spaces and materials will save many management problems later on. Typically at least one week, ten minutes per day, is sufficient to prepare children for success. During this ten minute role play, children should move from their seats into the designated literacy spaces; review and read as a small group the posted rules and directions; get into proper seating arrangements within their designated literacy space based on the posted task directions; distribute literacy tasks and materials; and practice the clean up of the literacy space and materials.



# Managing Literacy & Exploratory Learning Centers



## Training Children for Work in Centers SIX WEEK TRAINING

### ➤ Sixth Week of Training

- Of course during this time, children are becoming more excited, anxious, and motivated to enter these literacy spaces as they engage in the role modeling activities. We have also found that using digital photographs of children properly engaged in the various literacy spaces are helpful as a model for children later on as well. One teacher we know simply asks her children if they look like the children in the picture. If not, she asks what they should do about their behavior to align it with the learning activity as shown in the example picture.

# Managing Literacy & Exploratory Learning Centers

## Training Children for Work in Centers

### SIX WEEK TRAINING

- Training the movement between and among spaces in print rich classrooms: Minimizing transition times and maximizing practice and instruction.

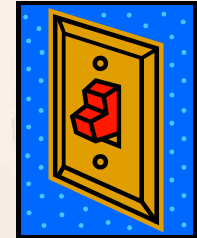
- Training children for efficient movement between activities and into and out of various classroom literacy spaces is essential for minimizing transition times and maximizing literacy practice and instructional time. A worthwhile goal is to get transition times between activities and movements to other classroom spaces down to a single minute so that the bulk of classroom time is spent on reading and writing practice and instruction.





# Managing Literacy & Exploratory Learning Centers

## Training Children for Work in Centers SIX WEEK TRAINING



- Training the movement between and among spaces in print rich classrooms: Minimizing transition times and maximizing practice and instruction

We use four steps to make this happen.

1. At this point, we provide brief, well sequenced, and repetitive directions written on cue cards. Children must look and read to get the directions for what is to be done in the time allotted.
2. We use our signal devise once again to alert children to follow the directions in the time allotted.
3. And finally, we use our signal devise to let the children know they are to make the move to the next classroom literacy space in a quiet and efficient manner.
4. We use a consistent signal such as a hotel registration bell, turning off the lights, etc., to alert children to stop what they are doing or freeze and listen for directions.

# Affecting Changes in Classrooms that Work: Classroom Procedures

## Training Children for Work in Centers

### SIX WEEK TRAINING



#### ➤ Aligning the seating arrangement with desired interactions in literacy spaces

- Research has shown an increase in on-task behaviors, as well as an increase in the quantity and quality of work completed when seating arrangements match the learning tasks to be performed, e.g. rows for individually completed learning tasks and collaborative seating arrangements, e.g. tables for small group or paired learning tasks. Although children prefer grouped seating arrangements, measures of on-task behaviors for completing individual learning tasks increases when the seating arrangement is changed to rows or desks from groups or table seating. Teachers should carefully, “consider the design of physical environments in the context of pedagogical purposes.”  
*(Bennett & Blundell, 1983; Wheldall & Lam, 1987; Yeomans, 1989, Hastings and Schwieso, 1995, p.290)*
- If the task to be completed is to be completed in isolation, alone, or individually, then the seating arrangement should call for children to be at their desks away from others.
- If the task is to be completed by pairs or small groups of children, then the seating arrangement should support this by placing children at a table or a small classroom floor space where they can work together.



# Evidence of Training



# Examples of Classroom Support for Small Group and Independent Practice





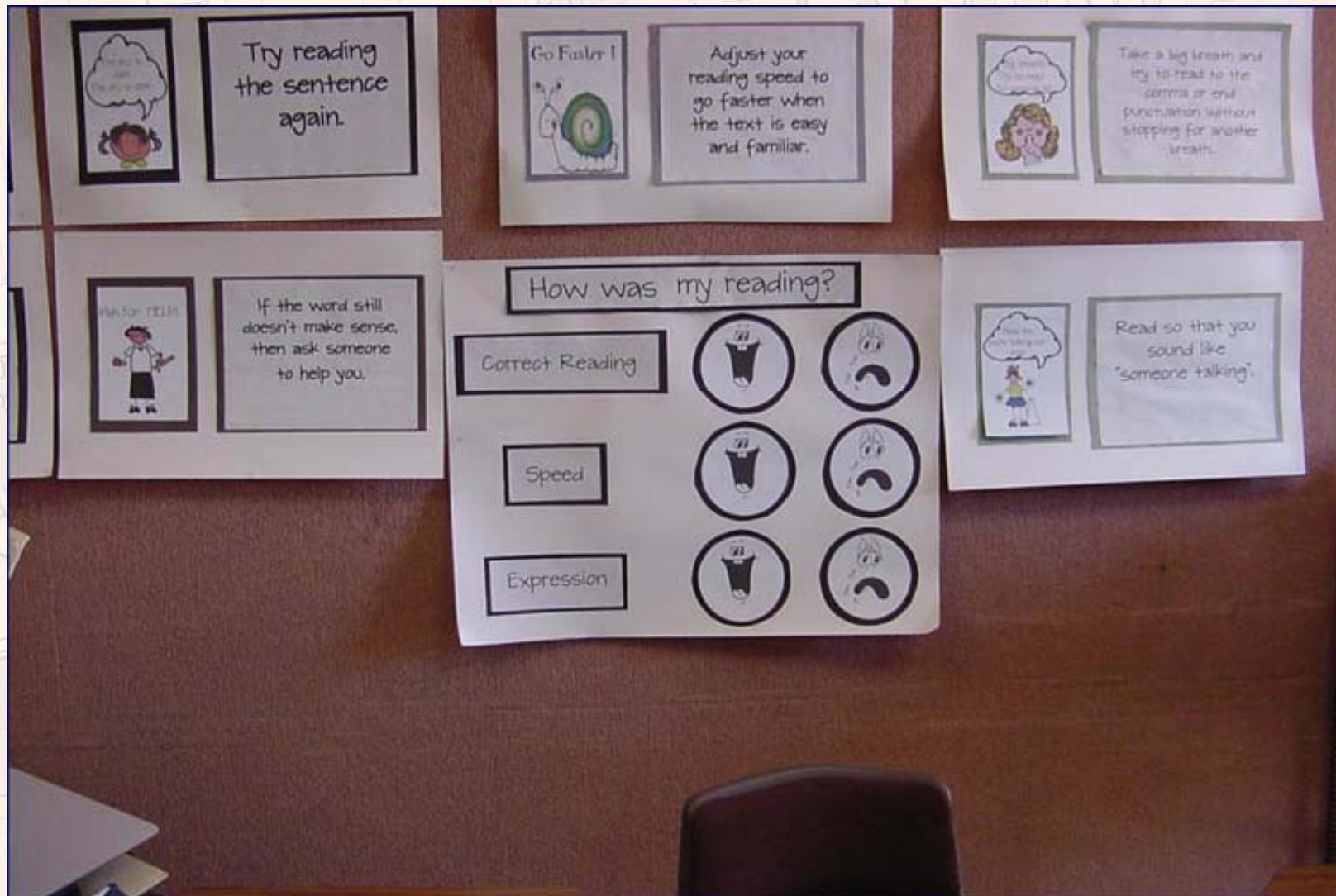
# Examples of Classroom Support for Small Group and Independent Practice

- Choral reading – echoic, unison, popcorn, mumble, etc.
- Paired Reading – Buddy, NIM, Read along tapes, CDs, etc.
- Individual Recorded Reading – Cassette tapes
- Performance – Readers' Theater





# Examples of Classroom Support for Small Group and Independent Practice



# Tracking Progress

## Progress Monitoring







# Centers Information

## Books to Read

Morrow, L. M., Reutzel, D. R. & Casey, H. (2006). Organizing and Managing Language Arts Teaching: Classroom Environments, Grouping Practices, Exemplary Instruction, pp. 559-581. In C. Weinstein & C. Evertson (Eds.), *Handbook of Classroom Management: Research, Practice, & Contemporary Issues*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Reutzel, D. R., & Morrow, L. M. (2007). Promoting and Assessing Effective Literacy Learning Classroom Environments, pp. 33-49. In R. McCormick & J. Paratore (Eds.), *Classroom Literacy Assessment: Making Sense of What Students Know and Do*. New York: Guilford Press.

8. Reutzel, D. R. (2007). Organizing Effective Literacy Instruction: Differentiating Instruction to Meet the Needs of All Literacy Learners, pp. 313-343. In L. M. Morrow, L. B. Gambrell, and M. Pressley (Eds.), *Best Practices for Literacy Instruction, 3rd Edition*. New York: Guilford Press.



**If you would like a copy of  
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